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THE NEW INTERDENOMINATIONALISM

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The new interdenominationalism is not wholly an American product, although its fullest realization is in the United States. Dissenting churches of England have expressed a common fellowship in various leagues and unions; and, even in matters of government and politics, evince a degree of solidarity, natural as over against an established church. In Canada the spirit of combination and unity has gone even farther, at first bringing into organic union the Baptists and Free Baptists of the maritime provinces, and then moving toward an organic union, not yet quite completed but awaiting final sanction, of the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Methodist churches of all Canada.

A BRIEF RETROSPECT

In the United States the centralizing tendencies have been manifest in three directions. In priority of time appeared first interdenominational organizations composed of individuals out of many churches, who, without compromise of creedal confessions or ecclesiastical relations, united for common tasks of benevolence and service either in definite areas or for special classes. Some of these organizations, like the Young Men's Christian Association and the United Society of Christian Endeavor, have become nation-wide and world-wide in the scope of their activities. To these may be added a great variety of societies which touch almost every form of philanthropic, social, and missionary endeavor. Next in time and importance arose the tendency to bring into a common center the representatives of different denominations, at first in the lesser areas of cities and states and at length in the nation, for consultation respecting infringement of rights, grievances, and competition; respecting secularizing tendencies, encroachments

of materialism, common perils, and foes; and respecting plans and policies for the realization of a dawning fellowship and the accomplishment of common tasks. At practically the same time this centralizing movement among denominations had a centripetal effect upon the members of denominational groups, the scattered and alienated fragments of ecclesiastical families. An effort was made in 1906 to bring into one body the Congregationalists, the United Brethren, and the Protestant Methodists of the United States. In the same year the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church were reunited and an attempt made to include in the union other Presbyterian bodies. The Baptists of the North, having perfected for themselves in 1907 a Northern Baptist Convention, centralizing in its membership the membership of its previously unrelated benevolent and missionary societies, then received into the common brotherhood in 1911 the Free Baptist churches of the country, and in 1915 the General Baptists, both of which bodies recovered, in the Baptist family, an alienated fellowship. Triennially, the Baptists of the North and the South meet in a general convention; and once in five years the Baptists of the world hold a session of the Baptist World Alliance. The Methodist churches, divided in 1844 into a northern and a southern branch, are in this year of grace 1916, at the very time these words are written, considering a plan of reuniting all Methodism in the United States as the Methodist Church, without geographical designation and restriction.

All of these tendencies and movements toward combination and compactness, pronounced in the early years of the twentieth century, were at the same time both causes and effects of a growing conviction that the denominations, as such, should have a common center, into which might flow the details of work and of experiences which belonged, in part at least, to all, and out of which might issue the testimony of common convictions, the purposes of common plans, and the spirit of fellowship which expresses both the brotherhood of Christian disciples and the effectiveness of united strength. As early as 1882, Rev. Washington Gladden, D.D., now pastor emeritus of the First Congregational Church, Columbus,

Ohio, wrote for the *Century* a series of articles entitled, "The Christian League of Connecticut," in which was outlined, purely as an imaginary ideal, methods by which all denominations in the state of Connecticut might combine for better evangelization and more efficient social ministry throughout the towns and villages of the state. This series of articles produced a profound impression, and may be called the first classic treatment of the principles of local and state church federation. Out of this impulse issued several attempts at uniting, leaguely, or federating Christian forces. The oldest one in existence, established in 1887, is the Christian League of Methuen, in Methuen, Massachusetts. Another attempt, originating, however, in impulses apparently unassociated with the Connecticut plan, on suggestion of a Methodist pastor, caught up by a Congregational college president, and largely formulated by a Free Baptist, was organized in 1890 as the Interdenominational Commission of Maine, the oldest state federation. The oldest city federation took shape in New York City in 1895. Out of these movements and others like them came at length in 1899, in New York City, the first meeting which looked directly toward a national federation of local federated workers. William E. Dodge, president of the Evangelical Alliance, presided over this meeting, while Dr. E. B. Sanford, later a national apostle of federation, was the secretary. In 1900, in Philadelphia, this body became more definite under a constitution and under the name, "The National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers." Other meetings followed in different cities, and then there was held in Carnegie Hall, New York City, in 1905, an epoch-making assembly known as "The Inter-Church Conference on Federation," at which representatives of the different denominations of the country, for the first time in significant numbers, gave serious attention to a federation, not now of individuals acting upon their own initiative, but of delegates appointed by their own ecclesiastical judicatures, with authority to represent their several bodies; and in 1908, in Philadelphia, there was organized, as the outcome of preceding and concurring deliberations, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, as yet the most complete expression in organized form of the new interdenominationalism in America, if not indeed in the

world. The Federal Council reports a constituency of thirty denominations, including a membership of almost eighteen millions of communicants.

Coincident with this movement, culminating in the formation of the Federal Council of Churches, there has been a movement, simpler in some respects, more ambitious in others, which, originating in the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1910, under the name of "A World Conference on Faith and Order," seeks to bring all communions, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Protestant alike, into a united fellowship so as to recover the unity of original Christianity. This movement has received a cordial response from most of the churches of America and many of the communions throughout the world.

CAUSES UNDERLYING THE MOVEMENT

No historic movement is detached and isolated. It is a part of general history. No less true is this in the realm of religion than in the domain of secular affairs. All causes are not easily discernible. Scarcely is one cause separable from others, even in point of time. Among the causes and conditions which have made the new interdenominationalism possible may be named the following.

The international brotherhood, which has been spreading throughout the world, has had necessarily a powerful effect upon the churches. The thoughts of men more than ever before are, in the terms of man, all-embracing, universal. The very physical appliances and inventions which promote easy and rapid transportation, convenient and flexible communication, have their effect upon Christian organizations, even upon the philosophy and theology through which Christianity seeks to express and defend itself. The railroad, the steamboat, the telegraph, the telephone, the post-office, and the printing-press break down barriers, remove isolation, and establish community of interests in the church as well as in business and in society. A new interdenominationalism is inevitable when a new internationalism arises.

The progress of democracy has tended to bring men into fellowship. Very few are the fundamental, cardinal convictions of democracy. One may almost count them upon the fingers.

Prominent are the three which have been wrought out in American history: (1) that the right of government rests upon the consent of the governed; (2) that the people, having selected their own form of government, must be left undisturbed and unmenaced by other powers (this, in the United States, is the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine); (3) and that other peoples, and all peoples, who have established a government acceptable to themselves, must be protected by each and every nation which desires its own integrity and autonomy to be preserved. In other words, there has been growing up, as the natural corollary of democracy, a fellowship of nations, looking toward a parliament of nations and the perfecting of a code of international law. These few fundamental principles of democracy, a simple application of Christian principles to the governments of men, have profoundly affected the spirit and the attitude of the church in its various branches toward the common cause and the common interests.

A new scholarship has been uniting the Christian church during practically a hundred years. Christian scholarship is no longer dogmatic, nor even apologetic and defensive, in the sense in which it was not many years ago. It is now the scholarship of investigation, seeking after truth, less eager to defend a dogma than to establish a fact and discover the relations thereof to all other facts. It is both scientific and synthetic. Such scholarship knows no sect; it is the monopoly of no single church; it is interdenominational. Before the churches, as such, thought of standing on common ground, the scholarship of the churches had come to some practical agreements respecting the fundamentals of their common faith. The new fellowship really began at the top, intellectually, and the fellowship of Christian scholars was real before men understood the fellowship of Christians. The higher criticism, which brought upon many Christians what appeared to be a mortal terror, has really contributed to an underlying conviction of unity in the minds of the more intellectual and thoughtful members of the Christian church. Even where conclusions have differed, the fellowship of scholars, in the employment of common historic methods and in the unbiased pursuit of truth, has broken down the partition walls which had previously divided them into sects.

The experience of the church in this and in other lands has confirmed a dawning consciousness of unity. Inquisitions have proved historic failures. Repression and coercion but increase and scatter that which they undertake to annihilate. Heresy hunts have brought trouble and destruction; they have never purified and rebuilt. Men have learned, therefore, though slowly and painfully, that toleration is more expedient than persecution, if indeed not far more Christlike. The spirit of toleration spreading through the church, re-enforced by the experience of missionaries with other missionaries, both at home and abroad, has permitted the existence of intellectual variation in the midst of each communion; and nearly all Christians are at length aware that in their own denominations there are quite as wide varieties of faith and practice, tolerated in a right wing and a left wing of their own church, as prevail between denominations themselves.

The awakening of the church to the need of a social gospel and the recognition of social problems which can be solved only through the application and exemplification of Christian principles in political and social institutions, has resulted in a demonstration that a true basis of fellowship lies in service to man, wherein the will, directing action, is employed, rather than the intellect, in drawing distinctions and making definitions. People who work together, rather than those who debate together, become united. A common ministry in social service produces a united church. While theology may differentiate, ministry surely unifies men. All the efforts to apply to human needs the principles of the gospel by legislation, by remedial and correctional organizations, by the introduction of a new social order and the creation of a compact social consciousness, are resulting steadily in the formation of a united church.

The new education is one of the causes introducing the new era. Science is in vogue. Facts, demonstrable under the microscope and in the crucible, incontestable and indisputable, hold sway. The dogmatism of science is almost unchallenged. Even when a man cannot see a scientific fact, he dares not deny it. The new education is producing a set of men who, each in his own specialized sphere, say to the others, "You must accept what I declare,

because I proclaim scientific truth; and I accept what you proclaim because you too declare scientific truth." Specialization, producing experts, nevertheless tends to beget subserviency to authority; and the new education is almost obliterating the power of philosophical dissent.

A new interdenominational literature, grown puissant, threatens to monopolize the field of reading. The weekly journals, like the *Independent*, the *Christian Union*—later called the *Outlook*—and, of a somewhat different class, the *Christian Herald*, the *Sunday School Times*, and the *Christian Endeavor World*, have crowded the purely sectarian periodicals almost out of existence, while the denominational weeklies which survive the stress of competition have broadened and enriched their scope, both of matter and spirit, and deal with religious themes in a less biased and more human manner. The monthly and the quarterly periodicals which exist today are more social than sectarian. A protagonist of the doughty type, defending sectarian shibboleths, can scarcely now be found. In the weightier books, also, of history, interpretation, theology, social experiment, and devotion, we are reading the thoughts of an interdenominational literary school; we read the message without reference to the author's ecclesiastical affiliations. Indeed not one of us today keeps himself in literature immune from other-denominationalism. Whether aware of it or not, we have long been thinking interdenominationally.

Naturally enough, the church has felt the same pressure which practical men of affairs, owing largely to an economic impulse, have brought to bear upon all forms of activity, by which combinations, consolidations, and organized "trusts" have been created. Capital long since pooled its issues in corporations, the smaller constantly giving place to larger combinations. Labor gathered scattered individuals into local unions, and these in turn into associations and federations. All the arts and sciences, all the philanthropies and charities, and many of the purely social functions have tended toward centralized forms of expression. The economic cry has been, "Let us cut out waste; let us eliminate competition; let us reduce overhead charges!" It is not at all surprising that the men who have been reconstructing industrial and commercial enterprises, upon the

principle of consolidation, should bring into church circles and church councils the same principles and advocate their adoption and application with even increased insistence.

There has been a great "drift" in ecclesiastical affairs, as there has been in all human affairs, toward a common center. The considerations already named indicate this, perhaps in part account for it. But the "drift" occurs apart from human recognition. Forces of which men are but partially conscious conspire to produce more definite and larger results than men plan. Is it the influence of the Spirit? Are the divine purposes reaching accomplishment? Has the Spirit of God been brooding over the chaos of sectarian differences, petty littlenesses, and discordant turmoils, producing order, a cosmic order of a new creation? The twentieth century would appear to be a fit time for the fulfilment of that divine desire that "they all may be one."

PERILS OF CENTRALIZATION

No great movement, such as this of the new interdenominationalism, is devoid of extreme danger. Progress seldom moves in rigidly straight lines; its course is rather circular, or spiral, changing direction and moving upward. The straight course is liable to take one off "on a tangent." Tangential departures, overemphasis upon half-truths, insistence upon temporary conditions as though permanent, the ossification of spirit into cold forms, the intrusion of personal ambition in the place of the common weal, the misfit of men, and the unnecessary jolts in breaking with the past—all these and others are perils besetting the movement.

There is danger that the place of the individual may be lost. No system which reduces free and independent spirits to the level of mere cogs and wheels in a social machine is worth maintaining. There is a *Kultur* which perfects the state but loses the citizen. It would be most unfortunate to produce a church which had no Christians. The Middle Ages did this. Our modern age faces the peril. A hierarchy may grow out of superorganizations. While it would be folly to create a bugaboo out of nothing and raise a hue and cry when there is no cause, yet it would be even greater folly to ignore a peril into which the church of the past centuries more

than once has run. For a man no better thinking can be done than his own; his soul's activity is better than all other for him; even his errors, if honestly his, are better for him than truths, dishonestly come by, unassimilated, and in the soul unknown. The peril of losing the individual may be avoided if his soul-liberty be unimpaired.

The tendency to overorganization is an American sin. Seeking to combine two bodies, we not infrequently unite parts of the two, leave in separate existence fragments of the two, and have as the result of our efforts three bodies existing where previously there were but two. In such a case our movement toward unity has multiplied rather than reduced divisions. Aiming at unity, one, we divided two, and obtained three! This peril, by no means imaginary, constantly confronts the Christian church in all its endeavors after federation. The goal cannot be attained by legislation. It is impossible to effect combinations by subtle strategy, overtaking men and snaring them in the mesh of a new organization, unawares. Even when whole ecclesiastical processions seem to march, almost with one accord, into a new inclosure, the germ of a perpetuated existence or the seed of a new dissension has not been removed until the last straggler and the smallest group of individuals, by persuasion and reconciliation, have been brought into the fold. In discussing ecclesiastical unions we must not speak of majorities. Minorities are bodies, if objecting, unrelated, and ununited. Minorities make divisions. The new interdenominationalism which is coming has required centuries of preparation. It must take time for its consummation. It must preserve a unity behind the vanguard, while it seeks a unity before.

As all reality tends to lose its substance and be continued in mere form, so the spirit of a unified church may be lost at length in the external letter of agreements, platforms, constitutions, recorded rolls, committees, officers, and the other paraphernalia of an organized body. The very size of a vast organization renders its speedy mobilization impossible. It is easy for an official to say, "We represent thirty denominations," when it may be that not even one denomination is represented in the act referred to; and it is easy to say, "We speak for nearly eighteen million Christians,"

when it may be that not one of the eighteen millions, outside of the committee formulating the utterance, would express exactly the same sentiments. There is the great danger of assumption—of assuming a spiritual content, within the external forms of organization, when the content is lacking.

There is the peril of geographical localization and limitation. Even New York is provincial when compared with the whole country. The disposition to practice a too rigid economy in avoiding the expense of travel, to seek the propinquity of committeemen and commissions for the sake of easily obtaining a quorum, to eliminate critics and dissenters in the interests of an early harmony and a foregone conclusion, to prepare for action politically and railroad it through expeditiously in the interest of what appear to be clearly recognized, desirable ends, has its serious and far-reaching dangers.

The peril of diffuseness, of dissipation of responsibility, and departure from the central authority, is ever present. If the new interdenominationalism expresses itself in (1) a federal council, which in its quadrennial session numbers three hundred persons, representing twenty-six denominations, and this federal council represents itself by (2) an executive committee, which in its annual meeting numbers one hundred persons, representing twenty-five denominations, and this executive committee represents itself in (3) an administrative committee, which may meet at intervals as called, and in its meetings actually consists of from five to twenty-five persons, and then this administrative committee represents itself in (4) a subcommittee, or through (5) an officer, charged with some special task, and in many instances clothed with large discretionary power, to what extent is the resultant action representative of the great federation in whose behalf it has been taken? The final act is far from the seat of power, being four or five steps removed from the original, constituent bodies, and, at any moment, may be disclaimed as representative in any sense of the whole. Similarly with commissions, subordinate to the council, yet independent in certain fields, there exist in some instances "committees of direction" which are equivalent to executive committees, and executive officers, all of whom, partial in their representation, profess at

times to speak and to act for the whole. In weighty matters, in subjects of delicate, sensitive, or critical significance to any one member of an organization, or to the organization as a whole, there is liable at any moment to be an explosion, a revolt against an alleged representative character, which in no sense represents the persons or the parties involved. The responsibility of speaking and of acting in behalf of eighteen million individuals, each free, independent, thoughtful, and presumably conscientious, is well-nigh appalling.

The peril of officialism overtakes many an officer and many an organization. Form and routine, appointments and correspondence, system and finance, reports and statistics, produce a treadmill of toil; and he who becomes harnessed to the round feels the pressure of the mere mechanics of his office and is in danger of exalting these formal accompaniments of his services to the place of ends for which he and his organization exist.

There is the danger of making a federal organization the doer of deeds which belong properly to the constituent bodies of which the federation is composed. Denominations have their own specific functions. Few if any of these should be taken from them and vested in a central body. For the federation to assume acts which properly belong to its members is not only an injustice to them, but is really a violation of the federative principle. In so far as the federation becomes a substitute for any denomination, doing the work which belongs distinctively to a denomination, it tends to become itself another denomination, not so named, not perchance so recognized, but essentially such, because of this denominational functioning. One of the pitfalls into which federations have fallen throughout the country in the brief history of their existence has been this of seeking to perform deeds which should be performed by the constituent bodies themselves. Indeed, many men fail clearly to understand that the highest function of a federation is not to usurp the powers and functions of the church in any of its ecclesiastical forms, but to be the central council chamber in which the representatives of the denominations, like a council of war, shall report resources and successes, shall formulate common plans of strategy and advance, shall assign and recognize distributed obligations

and interrelated responsibilities, and shall harmonize and synchronize action so as to give a common testimony, so far as possible, and present a united front against all common foes.

There is often the necessity of experimenting, of groping after the tasks, which, as many feel indistinctly, lie before a united church, but which few, if any, clearly discern. The Federal Council has been passing through these experiences of uncertainty and has not yet fully "found" itself. At first the program was one of speedy and extensive organization. The whole country was to be divided into districts, with an office and officers in each district. Federations were to be organized on standard patterns with model constitutions and common names and designations. No little mischief resulted from these attempts to cast in one mold the differing forms of expressing the selfsame spirit, which was moving toward an ecclesiastical unity. Many a day must elapse before the mistakes of this standardizing propaganda will be forgotten by some of the communions and some of the sections of the country, which move slowly, hold conservatively to old ways, and take suggestions from without very charily.

Next in order the Federal Council specialized its endeavor through the medium of its Commission on the Church and Social Service, upon a social service propaganda, wisely directed and richly fruitful, designed to clarify the atmosphere by defining the bounds and character of social service, and by arousing people within the church to a recognition of their social obligations and people outside the church to a realization of the sympathy and interest of the church toward all human ills and all human welfare. A great service, which is still in progress, has been rendered in this direction.

Then the Federal Council, receiving the countenance and support of wealthy allies, began to specialize on an extensive peace program and propaganda. The great European war unhappily interrupted this movement, even breaking up a world conference at which American Christianity was largely and influentially represented. This movement, although interrupted, has not been terminated. On a large scale American benevolence is being mobilized through the medium of the Federal Council for an

adequate relief of the dire distress in all Europe. The ready charity which proposes to go forth in the name of American Christians will help, it is confidently believed, in the reception of the overtures of peace when the time for them to be made has arrived.

In the very recent past the Federal Council, by publications and conferences, has laid strong stress upon rural conditions as affecting country churches. Extensive studies, some in New England and New York, some farther west and notably in Ohio, have been made of rural conditions, revealing in many instances a decadent church and even a disintegrating social fabric.

The character of these investigations and their wide publicity have aroused public attention and awakened public interest. The community church, as a remedy, seems to receive both popular approval and expert sanction. But the community church, if unrelated to its past, if disconnected from all denominational ties, if a purely local interdenominational organization of individual Christians, then loses relation to the world movements of missions and the vital forces of historic fraternalism; and if connected only with interdenominational churches like itself, tends to become, with the others, a new denomination of interdenominationalism broken, as other denominations are broken, into local and state groups with a national organization over them all. Under such conditions the evils of multiplied organizations, which the movement seeks to remedy, would simply be increased. The task of doing good and only good, in the midst of many opportunities for the evils of maladjustment, is delicate and intricate.

THE ADVANTAGES OF CLOSER UNION

Men are social beings; they cannot live apart; they ought not to make needless and unnatural divisions. Organizations for the sake of service and ministry are needful, but organizations which result in alienation of sympathy, disfellowship in work and worship, and disapproval of men's consciences and convictions, are pernicious. Jesus Christ expressed unto all men his sympathy and compassion. The bruised reed he would not break, the smoking flax he did not quench. His example is one of forbearance, inclusiveness, all-embracing love. It would be difficult to think of him

today, were he again among men in the flesh, as joining one denomination to the exclusion of all others. In spirit he must be recognized today as in them all, in part at least, if not completely. It takes us all to know the Christ and to express the Christ to the world. Jointly, therefore, we may give the better testimony; and together we may the better prepare for him a place.

The best recovery of apostolic conditions, so far as they are possible today, is the recovery of the united church. It would be absurd to think in apostolic forms, or to speak in apostolic terms, of denominations as they are named and defined now. The apostles were in simple relations; they were "brethren" and "of the way." When "churches" appeared, the term had a geographical significance. The church at Corinth, for example, was a community church. The divisions spoken of in Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, when some said, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ," did not indicate separate churches or distinct communions. There may have been separate congregations, meeting in the house of Stephanus, or in the house of Gaius, or in the house of Erastus, "the chamberlain of the city," or even in the house of Phebe; but however much the Christians of Corinth may have been divided, either because of convenience or by reason of factions, they all constituted one church—a church for a definite geographical area—the community church of Corinth. In like manner the churches at Thessalonica, at Colosse, at Laodicea, and at Rome obviously included all the Christians within these municipalities. The very language of the apostles indicates that all Christians constituted "the body of Christ." In the midst of diversity, a diversity of temperaments, talents, gifts, and tasks, there was essential unity.

Probably no greater incentive toward fellowship and unity has been felt among Christians than the expressed desire of the Lord Jesus Christ in his prayer, during the experience of his passion as narrated in the Fourth Gospel, when he prayed, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The fulfilment of this prayer calls for at least spiritual unity, if not organic union; and the prayer remains unanswered until the

disciples of the Master have that fellowship which produces harmony of purpose, unison of utterance, and co-operation in action.

It may be urged that Christianity itself is not clearly discernible until men behold more than one type of Christians. For their own self-culture Christians need to combine, to meet frequently with each other, to hear the recital of divergent experiences, and become acquainted with unlike convictions; for in this way only can the essentials of the Christian religion, in their variety and comprehensiveness, be understood.

Divisions into sects have been called "the sin of schism," "the luxury of denominationalism." It is the wasteful extravagance and folly of self-will. Against the reproach of such waste and wrong no good defense is possible. There have been the Middle Ages and the Dark Ages for the Christian church, and the wanderings in the wilderness of sin. To clear her garments of the stain of ages and her name from the reproach of history, the church must recover her forfeited fellowship, with all her parts, and see plainly her dismembered members.

The church must speak an accordant and harmonious testimony. The weight of her testimony is weak, if not indeed destroyed, when in one corner she affirms, and in another corner she denies, the same thing. She has an evidence to truth which must be given over against Mohammedanism, Brahminism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and all the pagan religions of the world. Jangling voices are heard at first, because curious, but at length are scorned. On the foreign missionary fields the representatives of Christ early discerned their essential unity, and found it not only possible, but, in many instances, easy, to employ a common proclamation and to organize nearly identical institutions. The great fundamentals of Christianity are not the property of any one branch of the Christian church. These fundamentals are the sacred bread which the dispensers of good must give to the hungry nations.

There is a great field for the exercise of Christian comity, which needs cultivation. Denominations, their leaders and their agents, ought surely to show toward one another the same measure of politeness and courtesy which people in ordinary social life evince. Indeed, the courtesy and comity of the Christian church ought to

exceed any kind of consideration, thoughtfulness, or chivalry manifest in secular affairs. To ride, roughshod, over the peculiarities, or the prerogatives, of a Christian body is brutal, no matter who the offender may be. To disregard the rights of priority and possession is worse than selfish—in many instances it is nothing short of embezzlement and larceny, however sanctimonious the excuse for so doing may be. The disregard of the principles of hospitality and fellowship in the practice of proselyting merits oftentimes the harshest condemnation. And the entrance of one denomination into a field which belongs to another is little less at times than highway robbery and brigandage. The Christian way of assigning fields to the undisturbed responsibility of one denomination has most happily been exemplified both in the homeland and abroad, so that men of different denominations, making geographical maps of what may be called “spheres of influence,” have really marked out the finer ethical and spiritual qualities of the undivided body of Christ, incarnate in his church. The sectarian plea, sometimes put forth, that no group of people should be deprived of the peculiar doctrines and dogmas of a given denomination ignores the fact that one avenue of approach to the great center of Christianity is sufficient for the pilgrim whose feet would bring him to that center. Only when we have been a long time at the center are we in condition to look back over the path we have pursued and compare it with other paths which might have been taken. Diversity and differentiation are not the means of evangelization. Philosophy and theology may scrutinize, compare, and synthesize; experience needs to go its single path. For the sake of the experiences of salvation, Christian people must not conflict, but should co-operate. Comity among denominations is soteriological.

Unless the Christian church can act more nearly as a unit than it has in the past, it will be sidetracked from human affairs and its influence will be regarded as negligible, even while men continue to revere the Christ. Already we have heard it rumored that men, outside of church membership, have applauded the name of Christ and hissed the name of the church. How can men, deeming themselves ground in the wheels of hard industry, crushed by the

oppression of greed and social injustice, listen to a church which busies itself with questions of precedent and procedure, with what seem to be the unimportant issues of sectarian distinctions and the wasteful luxury of purely denominational administration and conventionality? "The church is to do her work in the social order by bringing to bear upon it the idealism of her gospel and by infusing it with the impulse of her sympathy." How can this be, if the church is not a united church, at least in her ideals and her sympathy?

Our American conviction is, unhesitatingly, that church and state must not be united, must indeed have no entangling alliances. This does not mean that they are antipodal, that they are antagonistic, and must strive one with the other. On the contrary, as related to the higher welfare of society, they are moving in parallel, if not indeed in converging, lines toward a new social order, one being busied primarily with man and his soul, the other with his environment and his work. But how can the church be in worthy fellowship and partnership with the state, if her utterances are discordant, if her policies are chaotic, if her counsels are jargon, and her influence is dissipated in the maintenance of her divisions?

We are recognizing that communities are organisms, almost social beings, with a spirit, or *Geist*. Neighbors are intimately related in work and recreation, in property and person. They know each other's affairs; their sorrows and burdens are borne in common; their joys and successes are more or less mutual; their perils, their safeguards, their sins, their virtues, their religion, and their irreligion come almost within common circles. They have received the same education; they respond to very nearly the same kind of appeals; in business and politics, however much they may compete or clash, yet they remain side by side as neighbors, usually in good fellowship. Why should such people, so few as to be unable to support the luxury of many places of worship, divide up on Sunday in impoverished groups for the worship of their one common Father in the name of their one Lord and Master? Perhaps no task in all Christendom sets forth more urgently the need of this new interdenominationalism than the condition of these little local churches, historically sectarian, actually dying, which need

imperatively to know the fellowship of Christian brotherhood. Only when denominational authorities at the top, on well-recognized principles, with full understanding and approval, sanction the merging of these little ecclesiastical interests into one community church, can the little fragments feel the attractive influences toward a common Christian center and combine their resources in one house, under the ministry of one man of God serving one Lord.

When all other enterprises of men are becoming magnificent in size and importance, so that men speak boastingly of "big business," and the captains of industry receive rewards commensurate with their positions, not only in money value, but also in the opportunities for service to their fellows, how can the church expect to enlist and retain in her ministry men of the larger caliber, if she continues in her disjointed, schismatic state? Her leadership will conduct her to centralization, and, if she follows her leaders, she will retain them and enlist and create more.

There is a new theology among men. It cannot be disguised; it does not now need to be defined. The fact of its existence must be recognized; and then it must be known that, if it exists, like new wine in new bottles, it must clothe itself in new forms. The Christ himself cannot be retained among men, if the phrases referring to him and addressed to him have lost their vigor, their meaning, and have become cant—if the conceptions which men have formed concerning him, deep in their souls as the expression of their relations to him, have no outward manifestation in the institutions consecrated to him. The spiritual reincarnation of Jesus Christ, which must be perennially repeated, cannot be realized in our day unless the convictions of men find expression in their devotions.

One of the most significant and beautiful passages in the New Testament, susceptible, however, of grievous misunderstanding and abuse, is that in which the coming of the Spirit upon the company of the apostles and their associates is described. They were "of one accord" when the Spirit came upon them. The realm of the Spirit throughout the New Testament and confirmed by all human experience appears plainly to be unison of sentiment,

agreement in purpose and aspiration, "one accord." The fruits of the Spirit described by the apostle Paul are nearly all social. When the church has known her lean years, has it not been because of dissension and discord? Is there anything more potent among men, conditioning the divine presence and the divine power, than harmony and good will? When two or three are met together, when there is agreement as touching one thing, are there not great promises spoken?

THE OUTLOOK FOR DAYS TO COME

The historian who prophesies incurs peculiar peril. And yet is it not possible to foresee in part the future, when one has traced some of the developments of the past and is cognizant of the tendencies of the present? If there is a stream of progress flowing through time, does it not give its own forecast by its course, its volume, and its channel?

Undoubtedly the new interdenominationalism which is upon us is as yet simply a process. It is an attitude of mind rather than a fixed organization; it is a period of transition. Doubtless few, if any, of the forms in which it is now expressed will remain fixed as at present existing. None of the higher expressions of fellowship and of the spirit of unity have reached finality. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, weak in two directions, (1) in its lack of vital connection with the spiritual genius of the bodies which it represents, and (2) in its loose amalgamation of commissions almost entirely unrelated, has yet far to go in compacting its organization, in spiritualizing its activities, and in gathering into itself the interdenominational impulses toward unity, with the accompanying confidence which the central body must possess. A marvelous opportunity awaits the right kind of wisdom, unchallenged charity, and the sacrificial spirit of Christian service. The World Conference on Faith and Order is as yet "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," with the testimony and the appeal of essential unity.

If any of these movements gravitate into the control of a single denomination, or into the hands of a few men, no one can doubt that there will be quick and effective revolt against any ecclesiastical

oligarchy, any ruling hierarchy, howsoever created or named. No prelacy will be long tolerated in whatever guise of protestant forms or terms it may arise.

No one can doubt that the laity of our churches will be more in evidence, both controlling the church and performing its functions. The layman's day, which has dawned, has not reached its noon. The laymen first found fellowship; they found it in service. The laymen have carried the essential unity of Christians into many fraternal, benevolent, and philanthropic orders, into many socialized forms of industry and labor, and even into statutory expression through politics and legislation. The spirit of Christ, as regnant in society, may be voiced by the preacher, but is socially incarnated by the laymen. The laymen will require the compacting of Christians and the solidifying of Christian sentiment in small communities, through community churches and other forms of federation. The laymen will furnish the appeal, provide the means, and constitute the material for unity.

Theology, in the older sense of the word, dogmatic, apologetic, or biblical, will have less control over the church in the future than it had in the past. A philosophy of life will take its place. Life is larger than the functioning of a soul, temporarily housed in a tenement of flesh, fitting for mansions in the skies! God is now recognized as immanent in all creation; things secular have disappeared, because all things, in their time and place and proper proportion, have become holy; time, therefore, is not divided into sevenths, save for social convenience; places are not "cut off" (*templa*), save again as mental suggestions; and possessions are not tithed, save by those who have not attained to the ideas of Christian stewardship; the whole man is becoming Christianized. This is a great task; but it is the task before the church; and the church in meeting it must think more, and speak more, and act more in the terms of Christian socialism. The tests of orthodoxy, which may have served in the past, in the future will be discarded. The questions will not be asked, "Has he thought much, and believed correctly, and phrased rightly?" but rather, "Has he loved much, and served sacrificially?" The materialism and commercialism which now seem so largely to dominate society, and even to have

crept into the councils of the church, will, in the not distant future, be curbed and restrained by the growing spirit of altruistic brotherhood. Sin may be a perpetual factor to reckon with, and yet the sin of selfishness, though perhaps never entirely eradicated from human nature, is already finding its check in the growing spirit of social obligation.

So far as organizations are concerned, the movement now on by which the scattered members of denominational family groups are coming together will continue. One can look forward and easily say that, since fellowship is found more in service than in beliefs, the tendency of the future will be to gather the protestant denominations into two great groups, having reference to polity rather than to doctrines. There will be the tendency to gravitate toward a center congregationally governed, democratic in its types and principles; and another tendency to gravitate toward another center episcopally governed, with a larger measure of surrender of individual initiative and local independence to a central authority. None of the federations now in evidence seem to be final goals. They are expedients, transitory, though useful. Particularly is it true of local federations that their service appears largely as a means of transition. They may be called a *modus vivendi* or a *modus operandi*; they are not the formulation of the settled terms of compromise and fellowship. It may be reasonably expected that the federations of the country—speaking now of those in limited communities—will tend to move toward, and become parts of, some strong denomination, dominant in the region. This, with reference to a far-reaching policy, should not be objected to. The federated church is better than the union church; and the denominational church is better than the federated church. The union church is famous for its deficiencies; it lacks associational fellowship outside supervision, an adequate source of ministerial supply, approved literature, connection with, and responsibility for, education and missionary enterprises at home and abroad. The federated church has these, but has them fragmentarily, alternately, sectionally, and in parts which, while possibly totaling more than a whole, are never equal to the whole. The denominational church inherits all these associational advantages and

privileges, has them naturally, unitedly and in due proportion. The federated church, therefore, which tends to move toward a denominational center, becomes a part of the greater trek toward interdenominational centers. Of this we may be sure, that the centralizing movement of local churches is wiser, saner, more nearly correct historically, if kept within denominational bounds, than if encouraged and permitted outside of these bounds, as free movements, purely federative in character.

Interdenominational organizations, notably such as the Young Men's Christian Association, have sometimes been thought of as destined to be an adequate, organized expression of Christianity, taking the place of the organized church. It is true that they have some of the social marks of the church: they are an acceptable center for acquaintance and friendship; they are in many instances educational institutions, proclaiming truth, explaining the principles of life, and inculcating personal duties; they furnish partially an occasion, opportunity, and incentive to worship; and they are efficient means of ministry and service to the community and to the world, and, having taken on, as many of them have, the recognition of world-wide missions, they are exemplifying the mind of Christ in its universal inclusiveness. But such organizations present at least three serious deficiencies, which unfit them to be a substitute for the church of the future: (1) They lack historic continuity; they lack the ordinances, the ministry, the traditions, and the sacred associations of the church. (2) Necessarily they emphasize service, and so overemphasize it as largely to lose out of their own functions the element of worship, that spiritual exercise which unites the worshiper in fellowship with his God. (3) These organizations are partial, because most of them minister to but one sex, male or female, to but one age, young or old, or to but one class. The church has as its social unit the primary, fundamental social unit ordained of God, the family. The church of the future will not be less, but more, a family church, with a larger inclusiveness of children, with a wider reach unto both sexes, with a fuller, heartier, and more sincere manifestation of brotherhood and neighborliness.

One may say confidently that in the future Catholics and Protestants will discover a common fellowship. They are neighbors;

they are part of the same social fabric; they face the same perils; they grapple with the same foes; they are seeking to build up, and to realize here on earth, the kingdom of one common Christ. Each body may need purifying of some dross in varying proportions; neither is yet perfect. It is unreasonable to think that they should long continue in any sense hostile, or even perpetually keep apart. They are natural allies; they should be in alliance. Already there are not wanting signs of a growing friendliness and a heartier appreciation of each other. The World Conference on Faith and Order sets before itself consciously and distinctly this more embracing form of unity.

The mere mechanics of federation are of all things least important. Spiritual qualities are supreme. There is a new type of Christian evolving. He has respect for his own mental processes, because he is an independent, responsible being, endowed with liberty of soul and conscience. He thinks, therefore, his own thoughts, and is better respected in his thinking and for his thinking than in any previous day. He in turn, more fully than ever before, accords to others the same degree of soul liberty which he himself enjoys. So doing, he allows variety in experience and belief and accords liberty and toleration for all. The new type of Christian, therefore, even more conscientious than the old, is more charitable, more kindly, more altruistic, more fraternal. He asks no man to yield that which he himself does not surrender; he asks no man to conform to his standards, being himself unwilling to conform to the standards of any other man; he seeks the basis of unity, not in external conformity, but in spiritual qualities, in sincerity, in love of, and devotion to, truth, in fidelity to the highest claims as they become apparent. These marks of the modern disciple, becoming ever more numerous, are the promise of new interdenominationalism, the new Christianized social order.